September 11, 2025

huu ay aht
ANCIENT SPIRIT, MODERN MIND

Huu-ay-aht works together on Sarita River Economic Fishery 2025

It was a fun filled though labour-intensive day on September 11, 2025, when Huu-ay-aht First Nations (HFN) citizens, staff, and Nitinaht River Hatchery crew participated in the 2025 Sarita River Economic Fishery, broodstock collection destined for Nitinaht River Hatchery, and sampling for scientific analyses.

After everyone was fitted with chest waders, the HFN team headed to Sarita River. The crew from the Nitinaht River Hatchery met the HFN team there with a small boat, large seine net, and bags to transport live Chinook destined for broodstock. From the sandbar the team waded down the river, which was very low due to low tides and lack of rainfall during the summer months, floating totes for the food fish.



Nitinaht Hatchery crew with boat and seine net.





Huu-ay-aht First Nations team heading downstream with totes for food fish





A good-sized school of Chinook was observed about 200 meters downstream from the landing area, where the Hatchery crew set the net. Assisted by the HFN team, the net was pulled in towards shore and contained about 400-500 chinook.

Mature male and female Chinook with adipose fins intact (indicating they are wild Chinook and not hatchery reared) were collected for brood stock. They were identified as either male or female and placed into bags for the trip back upstream to trucks containing live tanks. From there, they were transported to the Nitinaht River Hatchery.



Live Chinook ready to be moved upstream. (left to right, Louella Dennis and Hipolite Williams, with live Chinook in bags.)



Live Chinook transferred to tanks for shipment to the Nitinaht River Hatchery to be bred for next spring's juveniles.

Hatchery reared fish were identified by the missing adipose fin and were selected for sampling and food fish. The HFN citizens, including youth and staff dispatched the fish and transported them back to the vehicles by floating the totes upstream. It took many trips, and it was a long wade up the river as the tide was rising to bring all the fish (302 Chinook, over 2000 lbs!) for processing.

Using a metal detector, the fish were first checked for coded wire tags which had been implanted into juvenile fishes before release from Nitinaht River Hatchery. The coded wire tags are tiny lengths of metal wire inscribed with a numeric code. These tags provide important information about individual fish origin, age, growth, run-time and other characteristics.



Anne Robinson (with metal detector) and Amelia Vos. Tagged Chinook were identified as male or female and measured for length. The heads which had coded wire tags were shipped to DFO for tag recovery and further sampling, including molecular analysis, to examine the genetic diversity of hatchery fish caught in Sarita River.

Those Chinook not having coded wire tags were sampled for scales and otoliths. All fish were then cleaned and packed on ice for transport to be sold. Early in the season, when Chinook are still silver in colour, they are highly desirable for sale and citizens can expect competitive prices from buyers. Later, as the colour darkens, many buyers create value added products, for example, smoking and candying before sale.



Tauri Young, Martha Johnson and Anne Robinson measuring and sampling fish.



Scales and otolith sampled by Tauri Young and Kensie Johnson-Sabbas



Tommy Joe and Louella Dennis transporting live fish.



Clifford Nookemus with a big Chinook.



Chinook on ice for transport.

The 2025 Economic Fishery took place over 5 days, with a total of 7846 lbs of hatchery Chinook harvested for food fish, and approximately 50 wild Chinook were transported to Nitinaht Hatchery for Sarita River broodstock.



Huu-ay-aht First Nations team and Nitinaht Hatchery crew at the end of a long day! (Left to right: Carey Evans, Caroline Cherry (Nitinaht River Hatchery staff), Chase Young, Louella Dennis, Conrad Young, Alysia Calhoun, Vanessa Young, Victoria Williams, Liera Young, Abigail Andiel, Nitinaht River Hatchery staff, Hipolite Williams, Amelia Vos, Patrick Nookemus, Tommy Joe, Scott Cheyne, Denee McMeekin (Nitinaht River Hatchery staff), and Clifford Nookemus.

The Sarita River Economic Fishery is led by Amelia Vos and Scott Cheyne, with support from Tommy Joe, Clifford Nookemus, and Abigail Andiel.

Many thanks to DFO and the crew from the Nitinaht River Hatchery who are working towards the restoration, sustainment and stewardship of the Sarita River Chinook population.

Photos by Heather Alexander